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SAPPHO

SAPPHO

A New Rendering

BY

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LONDON

HUTCHINSON AND CO.

PATERNOSTER ROW

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SAPPHO

I

SAPPHO lies remote from us, beyond the fashions and the ages, beyond sight, almost beyond the wing of Thought, in the world's extremest youth.

To thrill the imagination with the vast measure of time between the world of Sappho and the world of the Great War, it is quite useless to express it in years, one must express it in æons, just as astronomers, dealing with sidereal distances, think, not in miles, but in light years.

Between us and Sappho lie the Roman Empire and the age of Christ, and beyond

SAPPHO

the cross the age of Athenian culture, culminating in the white flower of the Acropolis.

Had she travelled she might have visited Nineveh before its destruction by Cyaxares, or watched the Phœnicians set sail on their African voyage at the command of Nechos. She might have spoken with Draco and Jeremiah the Prophet and the father of Gautama the founder of Buddhism. For her the Historical Past, which is the background of all thought, held little but echoes, voices, and the forms of gods, and the immediate present little but Lesbos and the Ægean Sea, whose waters had been broken by the first trireme only a hundred and fifty years before her birth.

SAPPHO

II

Men call her the greatest lyric poet that the world has known, basing their judgment on the few perfect fragments that remain of her song. But her voice is more than the voice of a lyric poet, it is the voice of a world that has been, of a freshness and beauty that will never be again, and to give that voice a last touch of charm remains the fact that it comes to us as an echo.

For of Sappho's poetry not a single vestige remains that does not come to us reflected in the form of a quotation from the works of some admirer, some one captured by her beauty or her wisdom or the splendour of her verse, or some one, like Herodian or Apollonius the sophist of Alexandria, who takes it to exhibit the æolic use of words or accentuation, or

SAPPHO

Hephæstion, to give an example of her choriambic tetrameters.

Only one complete poem comes to us, the Hymn to Aphrodite quoted by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, and one almost complete, the Ode to Anactoria, quoted by Longinus; all other quotations are fragments: a few lines, a few words, a word, the merest traces.

What fate gave us the shipping lists of Homer, yet denied us Sappho; preserved the *Lexicon Græcum Iliadis et Odysseæ* of Apollonius, yet cut the song to Anactoria short, and reduced the song of the orchard to three lines? or decided that Sophists and Grammarians, exhibiting dry-as-dust truths, should be a medium between her and us?

Some say that her works were burned at Constantinople, or at Rome, by the Christians, and what we know of the early

SAPPHO

Christians lends colour to the statement. Some that they were burned by the Byzantine emperors and the poems of Gregory Nazianzen circulated in their place.

* * * * *

But whatever the fate it failed in its evil intention. Sappho remains, eternal as Sirius, and it is doubtful if her charm and her hold upon the world would have been strengthened by the full preservation of her work.

As it is, added to the longing which all great art inspires, we have the longing inspired by suggestion. That lovely figure belonging to the feet she shows us "crossed by a brodered strap of Lydian work," would it have been as beautiful unveiled as imagined? Did she long for maidenhood? Why did the swallow trouble her, and

SAPPHO

what did the daughter of Cyprus say to her in a dream ?

There is not a fragment of Sappho that is not surrounded in the mind of the reader by the rainbow of suggestion. Just as the gods draped the human form to give desire imagination, so, perhaps, some god and no fate has all but hidden the mind of Sappho.

III

Looking at it in another way one might fancy that all the demons of malignity and destruction had conspired to destroy and traduce : to destroy the works and traduce the character of the poet.

The game of defamation was begun in Athens in the age of corruption by lepers, and carried on through the succeeding ages by their kind, till Welcker came with

SAPPHO

his torch and showed these gibbering ghosts standing on nothing and with nothing in their hands.

Colonel Mure tried to put Welcker's torch out, and only burned his fingers. Comparetti snuffed it, only to make it burn the brighter. But bright or dim, the torch was only intended to show the lepers. Sappho shines by her own light in the minutest fragments of her that remain—Fragments whose deathless energy, like the energy of radium, has vivified literature in all ages and times.

IV

The mind of Sappho runs through all literature like a spangled thread.

THE HYMN TO APHRODITE AND
FIFTY-TWO FRAGMENTS, TO-
GETHER WITH SAPPHO TO
PHAON, OVID'S HEROIC
EPISTLE XV

FOREWORD

TEAR the red rose to pieces if you
will,
The soul that is the rose you may
not kill ;
Destroy the page, you may, but not
the words
That share eternal life with flowers
and birds.

And the least words of Sappho—
let them fall,
Cast where you will, some bird
will rise and call,

FOREWORD

Some flower unfold in some for-
saken spot,
Hill hyacinth, or blue forget-me-
not.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	5
FOREWORD	15
I. HYMN TO APHRODITE .	21
II. ODE TO ANACTORIA .	23
III. WHERE BLOOMS THE MYRTLE	24
IV. I LOVED THEE	24
V. INVOCATION	25
VI. CLAÏS	26
VII. TO A SWALLOW . . .	26
VIII. LOVE	27
IX. WEDDING SONG . . .	28
X. EVENING	29

CONTENTS

	PAGE
XI. MAIDENHOOD . . .	30
XII. MOONLIGHT . . .	30
XIII. ORCHARD SONG . . .	31
XIV. DICA . . .	32
XV. GRACE . . .	33
XVI. AS ON THE HILLS . . .	33
XVII. TO ATTHIS . . .	34
XVIII. AS WIND UPON THE MOUN- TAIN OAKS . . .	34
XIX. GOODNESS . . .	35
XX. THE FISHERMAN'S TOMB . . .	35
XXI. TIMAS . . .	36
XXII. DEAD SHALT THOU LIE . . .	37
XXIII. DEATH . . .	37
XXIV. ALCÆUS AND SAPPHO . . .	38
XXV. THE ALTAR . . .	39

CONTENTS

	PAGE
XXVI. THE ALTAR . . .	39
XXVII. LOVE . . .	40
XXVIII. LIKE THE SWEET APPLE .	41
XXIX. PROPHECY . . .	41
XXX. FOR THEE . . .	42
XXXI. FRIEND . . .	42
XXXII. THE MOON HAS SET .	43
XXXIII. THE SKY . . .	43
XXXIV. TO HER LYRE . . .	44
XXXV. NEVER ON ANY MAIDEN .	44
XXXVI. * * * . . .	45
XXXVII. ANGER . . .	45
XXXVIII. ADONIS . . .	46
XXXIX. LEDA . . .	46
XL. THE CAPTIVE . . .	47
XLI. INVOCATION . . .	47

CONTENTS

	PAGE
XLII. YOUTH AND AGE . . .	48
XLIII. FRAGMENT . . .	49
XLIV. THE LESBIAN SINGER . .	49
XLV. ON THE TOMB OF A PRIESTESS OF ARTEMIS . . .	50
XLVI. TO A BRIDE . . .	51
XLVII. HERMES . . .	52
XLVIII. ADONIS . . .	53
XLIX. SLEEP . . .	53
L. THY FORM IS LOVELY . .	54
LI. THE BRIDEGROOM . .	54
LII. REGRET . . .	55
LIII. FRAGMENT . . .	55
LIV. SAPPHO TO PHAON . .	56

I

HYMN TO APHRODITE

DAUGHTER of Zeus and Immortal,
Aphrodite, serene
Weaver of spells, at thy portal
Hear me and slay not, O Queen !

As in the past, hither to me
From thy far palace of gold,
Drawn by the doves that o'erflew
me,
Come, as thou camest of old.

Swiftly thy flock bore thee hither,
Smiling, as turned I to thee,
Spoke thou across the blue weather,
“ Sappho, why callest thou me ? ”

HYMN TO APHRÓDITÉ

“Sappho, what Beauty disdains thee,
Sappho, who wrongest thine heart,
Sappho, what evil now pains thee,
Whence sped the dart?

“Flies from thee, soon she shall
follow,
Turns from thee, soon she shall love,
Seeking thee swift as the swallow,
Ingrate though now she may
prove.”

Come, once again to release me,
Join with my fire thy fire,
Freed from the torments that seize
me,
Give me, O Queen! my desire!

II

ODE TO ANACTORIA

THAT man, whoever he may be,
 Who sits awhile to gaze on thee,
 Hearing thy lovely laugh, thy
 speech,
 Throned with the gods he seems to
 me ;
 For when a moment to mine eyes
 Thy form discloses, silently
 I stand consumed with fires that rise
 Like flames around a sacrifice.
 Sight have I none, bells out of tune
 Ring in mine ears, my tongue lies
 dumb ;
 Paler than grass in later June,
 Yet daring all
 (To thee I come).

III

WHERE BLOOMS THE MYRTLE

O MUSE, upon thy golden throne,
Far in the azure, fair, alone.

Sing what the Teian sweetly sang,—
The Teian sage whose lineage
sprang

Where blooms the myrtle in the gay
Land of fair women far away.

IV

I LOVED THEE

I LOVED thee, Atthis, once,
once long ago.

V

INVOCATION

GODDESS of Cyprus come (where
beauty lights

The way) and serve in cups of gold
these lips

With nectar, mixed by love with
all delights

Of golden days, and dusk of
amorous nights.

VI
CLAÏS

I HAVE a daughter,
Claïs fair,
Poised like a golden flower in air,
Lydian treasures her limbs outshine
(Claïs, beloved one,
Claïs mine !)

VII
TO A SWALLOW

PANDION'S daughter — O fair
swallow,
Why dost thou weary me—
(Where should I follow ?)

VIII
LOVE

SWEET mother, at the idle loom I
 lean,
Weary with longing for the boy
 that still
Remains a dream of loveliness—to
 fill
My soul, my life, at Aphrodite's
 will.

IX

WEDDING SONG

WORKMEN lift high
The beams of the roof,
Hymenæus !

Like Ares from sky
Comes the groom to the bride,
Hymenæus !

Than men who must die
Stands he taller in pride,
Hymenæus !

X

EVENING

CHILDREN astray to their mothers,
and goats to the herd,
Sheep to the shepherd, through
twilight the wings of the bird,
All things that morning has scattered
with fingers of gold,
All things thou bringest, O Evening!
at last to the fold.

XI

MAIDENHOOD

MAIDENHOOD ! Maidenhood ! where
 hast thou gone from me,
Whither, O Slain !

I shall return to thee, I who have
 gone from thee, never again.

XII

MOONLIGHT

THE stars around the fair moon fade
Against the night,
When gazing full she fills the glade
And spreads the seas with silvery
 light.

XIII

ORCHARD SONG

COOL murmur of water through
apple-wood
Troughs without number
The whole orchard fills, whilst the
leaves
Lend their music to slumber.

XIV

DICA

WITH flowers fair adorn thy lustrous
hair,
Dica, amidst thy locks sweet blossoms twine,
With thy soft hands, for so a maiden stands
Accepted of the gods, whose eyes divine
Are turned away from her—though
fair as May
She waits, but round whose locks
no flowers shine.

XV
GRACE

WHAT country maiden charms thy
heart,
However fair, however sweet,
Who has not learned by gracious
Art
To draw her dress around her feet?

XVI
AS ON THE HILLS

As on the hills the shepherds
trample the hyacinth down,
Staining the earth with darkness,
there where a flower has
blown.

XVII

TO ATTHIS

HATEFUL my face is to thee,
Hateful to thee beyond speaking,
Atthis, who fliest from me
Like a white bird Andromeda
seeking.

XVIII

AS WIND UPON THE MOUNTAIN OAKS

As wind upon the mountain oaks
in storm,
So Eros shakes my soul, my life,
my form.

XIX

GOODNESS

HE who is fair is good to look
upon ;
He who is good is fair, though
youth be gone.

XX

THE FISHERMAN'S TOMB

OVER the fisher Pelagon Meniscus
his father set
The oar worn by the wave, the
trap, and the fishing net ;—
For all men, and for ever, memor-
ials there to be
Of the luckless life of the fisher,
the labourer of the sea.

XXI

TIMAS

THIS is the dust of Timas, who,
 unwed,
Passed hence to Proserpina's house
 of gloom.
In mourning all her sorrowing play-
 mates shed
Their curls and cast the tribute on
 her tomb.

XXII

DEAD SHALT THOU LIE

DEAD shalt thou lie for ever, and
forgotten,
For whom the flowers of song have
never bloomed ;
A wanderer amidst the unbegotten,
In Hades' house a shadow ay
entombed.

XXIII

DEATH

DEATH is an evil, for the gods
choose breath ;
Had Death been good the gods
had chosen Death.

XXIV

ALCÆUS AND SAPPHO

ALCÆUS

SWEET violet-weaving Sappho,
 whose soft smile
My tongue should free,
Lo, I would speak, but shame holds
 me the while
I gaze on thee.

SAPPHO

Hadst thou but felt desire of noble
 things,
Hadst not thy tongue proposed to
 speak no good,
Thy words had not been destitute
 of wings,
Nor shame thine eyes subdued.

XXV

THE ALTAR

THEN the full globéd moon arose,
and there
The women stood as round an
altar fair.

XXVI

THE ALTAR

AND thus at times, in Crete, the
women there
Circle in dance around the altar
fair ;
In measured movement, treading
as they pass
With tender feet the soft bloom
of the grass.

XXVII

LOVE

ALL delicacy unto me is lovely, and
for me,

O Love !

Thy wings are as the midday fire,
Thy splendour as the sun above.

XXVIII

LIKE THE SWEET APPLE

LIKE the sweet apple that reddens
At end of the bough—
Far end of the bough—
Left by the gatherer's swaying,
Forgotten, so thou.
Nay, not forgotten, ungotten,
Ungathered (till now).

XXIX

PROPHECY

METHINKS hereafter in some later
spring
Echo will bear to men the songs
we sing.

XXX

FOR THEE

FOR thee, unto the altar will I lead
A white goat—

To the altar by the sea;
And there, where waves advance
and waves recede,
A full libation will I pour for thee.

XXXI

FRIEND

FRIEND, face me so and raise
Unto my face thy face,
Unto mine eyes thy gaze,
Unto my soul its grace.

XXXII

THE MOON HAS SET

THE moon has set beyond the seas,
And vanished are the Pleiades ;
Half the long weary night has gone,
Time passes—yet I lie alone.

XXXIII

THE SKY

I THINK not with these two,
White arms to touch the blue.

XXXIV

TO HER LYRE

SINGING, O shell, divine !
Let now thy voice be mine.

XXXV

NEVER ON ANY MAIDEN

NEVER on any maiden, the golden
sun shall shine,
Never on any maiden whose wisdom
matches thine.

XXXVI

* * *

I SPOKE with Aphrodite in a dream.

XXXVII

ANGER

WHEN anger stirs thy breast,
Speak not at all
(For words, once spoken, rest
Beyond recall).

XXXVIII

ADONIS

AH for Adonis !
(Where the willows sigh
The call still comes
Through spring's sweet mystery.)

XXXIX

LEDA

THEY say, 'neath leaf and blossom
Leda found in the gloom
An egg, white as her bosom,
Under an iris bloom.

XL

THE CAPTIVE

Now Love has bound me, trembling,
 hands and feet,
O Love so fatal, Love so bitter-
 sweet.

XLI

INVOCATION

COME to me, O ye graces,
Delicate, tender, fair ;
Come from your heavenly places,
Muses with golden hair.

XLII

YOUTH AND AGE

IF love thou hast for me, not hate,
Arise and find a younger mate ;
For I no longer will abide
Where youth and age lie side by
side.

XLIII

FRAGMENT

FROM heaven returning ;
Red of hue, his chlamys burning
Against the blue.

XLIV

THE LESBIAN SINGER

UPSTANDING, as the Lesbian singer
stands
Above the singers of all other lands.

XLV

ON THE TOMB OF A PRIESTESS
OF ARTEMIS

VOICELESS I speak, and from the
tomb reply

Unto Æthopia, Leto's child, was I
Vowed by the daughter of Hermo-
cleides,

Who was the son of Saonaiades.

O virgin queen, unto my prayer
incline,

Bless him and cast thy blessing
on our line.

XLVI

TO A BRIDE

BRIDE, around whom the rosy loves
are flying,
Sweet image of the Cyprian un-
dying,
The bed awaits thee ; go, and with
him lying,
Give to the groom thy sweetness,
softly sighing.
May Hesperus in gladness pass
before thee,
And Hera of the silver throne bend
o'er thee.

XLVII

HERMES

AMBROSIA there was mixed, and
from his station
Hermes the bowl for waiting gods
outpoured;
Then raised they all their cups and
made oblation,
Blessing the bridegroom (by the
bride adored).

XLVIII

ADONIS

TENDER Adonis stricken is lying,
What, Cytherea, now can we do?
Beat your breasts, maidens, Adonis
 is dying,
Rending your garments (the white
 fragments strew).

XLIX

SLEEP

WITH eyes of darkness,
The sleep of night.

L

THY FORM IS LOVELY

THY form is lovely and thine eyes
are honeyed,

O'er thy face the pale
Clear light of love lies like a veil.
Bidding thee rise,
With outstretched hands,
Before thee Aphrodite stands.

LI

THE BRIDEGROOM

Joy born of marriage thou provest,
Bridegroom thrice blest,
Holding the maiden thou lovest
Clasped to thy breast.

LII

REGRET

THOSE unto whom I have given,
These have my heart most riven.

LIII

FRAGMENT

UPON thy girl friend's white and
tender breast,
Sleep thou, and on her bosom find
thy rest.

LIV

SAPPHO TO PHAON

A NEW RENDERING OF OVID'S HEROIC
EPISTLE, XV.

I

PHAON, most lovely, closest to my
heart,
Can your dear eyes forget, or must
I stand
Confessed in name, belovéd that
thou art,
Lost to my touch and in another
land.
Sappho now calls thee, lyre and
Lyric Muse
Forgotten, and the tears born of
her wrongs

SAPPHO TO PHAON

Blinding her eyes, upturned but to
refuse
Phœbus, the fountain of all joyous
songs.

I burn, as when in swiftmess, past
the byres,
Flame takes the corn, borne by the
winds that blow ;
For what are Ætna's flames to my
desires,
Thou, who by Ætna wanderest, O
Thou !
The Lyric Muse has turned, as I
from her,
Peace, Peace alone can join us once
again,

SAPPHO TO PHAON

The blue sea in its solitude lies fair,
But, desolate, I turn from it in pain.
No more the girls of Lesbos move
 my heart,
My blameless love for them is now
 no more,
Before my love for thee all loves
 depart,
Cold wanderer thou upon a distant
 shore.

O thou art lovely ! wert thou garbed
 like him,
Apollo by thy side a shade would be.
Garland thy tresses with the ivy dim
And Bacchus would be less himself,
 by thee.

SAPPHO TO PHAON

Apollo, yet, who bent, as Bacchus
fell,
One to the Cretan, one to Daphne's
fire,
Beside me, what are they? I cast
my spell
O'er seas and lands, the music of
my lyre
Echoes across the world where
mortals dwell,
Renders the earth in tune with
my desire.

Alcæus strikes Olympus with his
song,
Boldly and wild his music finds its
star.

SAPPHO TO PHAON

Unto the human does my voice
belong

And Aphrodite smiles on me from
far.

Have I no charms? has genius lost
her touch

To turn simplicity to beauty's
zone?

Am I so small, whose towering
height is such

That in the world of men I stand
alone?

Yea, I am brown—an Æthiopian's
face

Turned Perseus from his path, a
flame of fire.

SAPPHO TO PHAON

White doves or dark, which hath
the finer grace ?

Are they not equal, netted by
desire ?

If by no charm except thine own
sweet charm

Thou can'st be moved, ah then,
alas, for me !

Fires of the earth thy coldness will
not warm,

And Phaon's self must Phaon's
lover be.

Yet once, ah once ! forgetful of the
world,

SAPPHO TO PHAON

You lay engirdled by this world of
mine,
Those nights remain, be earth to
darkness hurled,
Deathless, as passion's ecstasy divine.
My songs around you were the
only birds,
My voice the only music, in your
fire
With kisses, burning yet, you killed
my words
And found my kisses sweeter than
desire.
I filled you with delight, when
close embraced ;
In the last act of love I gave you
heaven,

SAPPHO TO PHAON

And yet again, delirious as we
faced,

And yet again, till in exhaustion,
even

Love's self half died and nothing
more remained,

But earth and life half lost, and
heaven gained.

And now, Sicilian girls—O heart
of mine,

Why was I born so far from
Sicily?—

Sicilian girls, unto my words incline,

Beware of smiles, of insincerity,

Beware the words that once belonged
to me,

SAPPHO TO PHAON

The fruits of passion and the seeds
of grief ;

O Cyprian by the fair Sicilian sea,
Sappho now calls thee, turn to
her relief !

Shall Fortune still pursue me, luck-
less one,

With hounds of woe pursue me
down the years ?

Sorrow was mine since first I saw
the sun,

The ashes of my parents knew my
tears.

My brother cast the gifts of life away
For one unworthy of all gifts but
gold,

SAPPHO TO PHAON

Grief follows grief and on this woe-
ful day

An infant daughter in my arms
I hold.

Fates ! What more can ye do,
what more essay ?

Phaon ! ah yes, he is the last, I
know.

The first, the all, the grave that
once was gay,

The dark veil o'er my purple robe
ye throw,

My curls no more are curls, nor
scent the air

With perfume from the flowers
Egyptians grow,

SAPPHO TO PHAON

The gold that bound these locks of
mine so fair

Has parted for the wind these locks
to blow.

All arts of love were mine when he
was by,

Whose sun is now the sun of
Sicily:

Phaon! when I was born, the
mystic three

Called Aphrodite on my birth to
gaze,

And then the Cyprian, turning,
called on thee

To be my fate and fill my dreams
and days.

SAPPHO TO PHAON

Thou for whose sake Aurora's eyes
might turn
From Cephalus, or Cynthia give
thee sleep,
Pouring oblivion from night's marble
urn,
Bidding Endymion to watch thy
sheep !

—Lo ! as I write I weep, and
nought appears
But Love, half veiled by broken
words and tears.

You ! you ! who left me without
kiss or tear

SAPPHO TO PHAON

Or word, to murmur softly like a
child

Begotten of thy voice, deception
were

Less cruel far than silence, you
who smiled

Falsely so often, had you no false
phrase—

You who so often had false tales
to tell—

No voice there, at the parting of
our ways,

To say “Farewell, O Love!” or
just “Farewell”!

I had no gift to give you when you
passed,

SAPPHO TO PHAON

And wrongs were all the gifts
received from thee,
I had no words to tell you at the
last
But these : “ Forgo not life, forget
not me.”
And when I heard, told by some
casual tongue,
That thou wert gone, Grief turned
me then to stone,
Voiceless I stood as though I ne’er
had sung,
Pulseless and lost, forever more alone.
Without a sigh, without a tear to
shed,
Grief held me, Grief who has no
word to say.

SAPPHO TO PHAON

Then, rising as one rises from the
dead,
My soul broke forth as one breaks
forth to slay.
Rending and wounding all this
frame of mine,
Cursing the Gods, the moments
and the years,
Now like the clouds of storm,
where lightnings shine,
Uplifted, then resolving into tears.
Debased, when turns my brother in
his scorn
My grief to laughter, pointing to
my child ;
Till madness takes me as the fire
the corn

SAPPHO TO PHAON

And, in reviling thee, I stand
reviled.

Ah ! but at night,

At night I turn to thee.

In dreams our limbs are joined, as
flame with flame,

In dreams again your arms are
girdling me,

I taste your soul in joys I blush to
name.

Ah ! but the day that follows on
the night,

The emptiness that drives me to
the plain

To seek those spots that knew my
lost delight,

SAPPHO TO PHAON

The grotto that shall shield us not
again.

Here lies the grass we pressed in
deeds of love,

Lips, limbs entwined—I kiss the
ground to-day.

The herbs lie withered, and the
birds that move

Are songless, and the very trees are
grey.

Night takes the day and falls upon
the groves,

The nightingale alone is left to cry,
Lamenting, in the song that sorrow
loves,

To Tereus she calls, to Phaon, I.

SAPPHO TO PHAON

II

There is a spring, through whose
cool water shows

The sand like silver, clear as seen
through air.

There is a spring, above whose
mirror grows

A lotus like a grove in flower fair.

Here, as I lay in tears, a spirit
stood

Born of the water, then she called
to me,

Sappho, pursuing Love, by Grief
pursued,

Sappho, beside the blue Leucadian
sea

SAPPHO TO PHAON

There stands a rock, and there
 above the caves,
Whose wandering echoes reach
 Apollo's fane,
Down leaping to the blue and
 breaking waves,
Lovers find sleep, nor dream of
 love again.
Deucalion here found ease from
 Pyrrah's scorn,
Sappho arise, and where the sharp
 cliffs fall,
Thy body, that had better not been
 born,
Cast to the waves, the blue, blue
 waves that call.
I rise, and weeping silently, I go.

SAPPHO TO PHAON

My fear is great, my love is greater
still.

Better oblivion than the love I
know,
Kinder than Phaon's is the blue
wave's will.

Ye favouring breezes, guard me on
this day,
Love, lend your pinions, waft me
o'er the sea
Where, lovely Phœbus, on thy
shrine I'll lay
My lyre, with this inscription unto
thee :
“ Sappho to Phœbus consecrates her
lyre,

SAPPHO TO PHAON

Unto the God the gift, the fire to
fire."

III

ALAS ! and woe is me.

But must I go ?

O Phaon, Phœbus' self to me is less
Than Phaon—will you cast me
down below

All broken, for the cruel rocks to
press

This breast, that loved thee, ruined ?
—Ah ! the song

Born of the Muses leaves me and
the lyre

Is voiceless—they no more to me
belong,

SAPPHO TO PHAON

And in this darkness dies the
heavenly fire.

Farewell, ye girls of Lesbos, fare ye
well ;

No more the groves shall answer to
my song,

No more these hands shall wake
the lyre to tell

Of Love, of Life—to Phaon they
belong,

And he has fled.

O Loveliness, return,
Make once again my soul to sing
in joy,

Feed once again this heart with
fires that burn,

SAPPHO TO PHAON

Gods! can no prayers avail but to
destroy,

No songs bring back the lost, no
sighs recall

The lost that was my love, my life,
my all?

Return! Return!

Raise to the wind thy sail,
Across the sea bring back to me
the years,

Eros shall lend to thee the favour-
ing gale,

The track is sure where Aphrodite
steers.

SAPPHO TO PHAON

Let thy white sail be lifted on the
rim

Of sky that marks the dark dividing
seas.

Failing that far-off sail, remain
the dim

Blue depths where once Deucalion
found release.

Failing that far-off sail, the waves
shall give

Death, or Forgetfulness, whilst still
I live.

THE END

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